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ABSTRACT

This guide presents advice for university faculty and professional staff members to help them understand and respond when students are in emotional distress. It includes a reference for signs of extreme stress and advice on how to intervene. Common causes of emotional distress are listed and warning signs of distress are given. Suggestions are given for faculty members who choose to intervene when signs of emotional distress are noted in a student. Information is provided on how to make referrals and how faculty members can obtain consultation services for themselves. A section on the Counseling and Psychological Services program at Western Carolina University (North Carolina) discusses the program's appointment scheduling, first visits, and emergency response. A list of other resources provides telephone numbers for a variety of hotlines and social services in the area. (NB)

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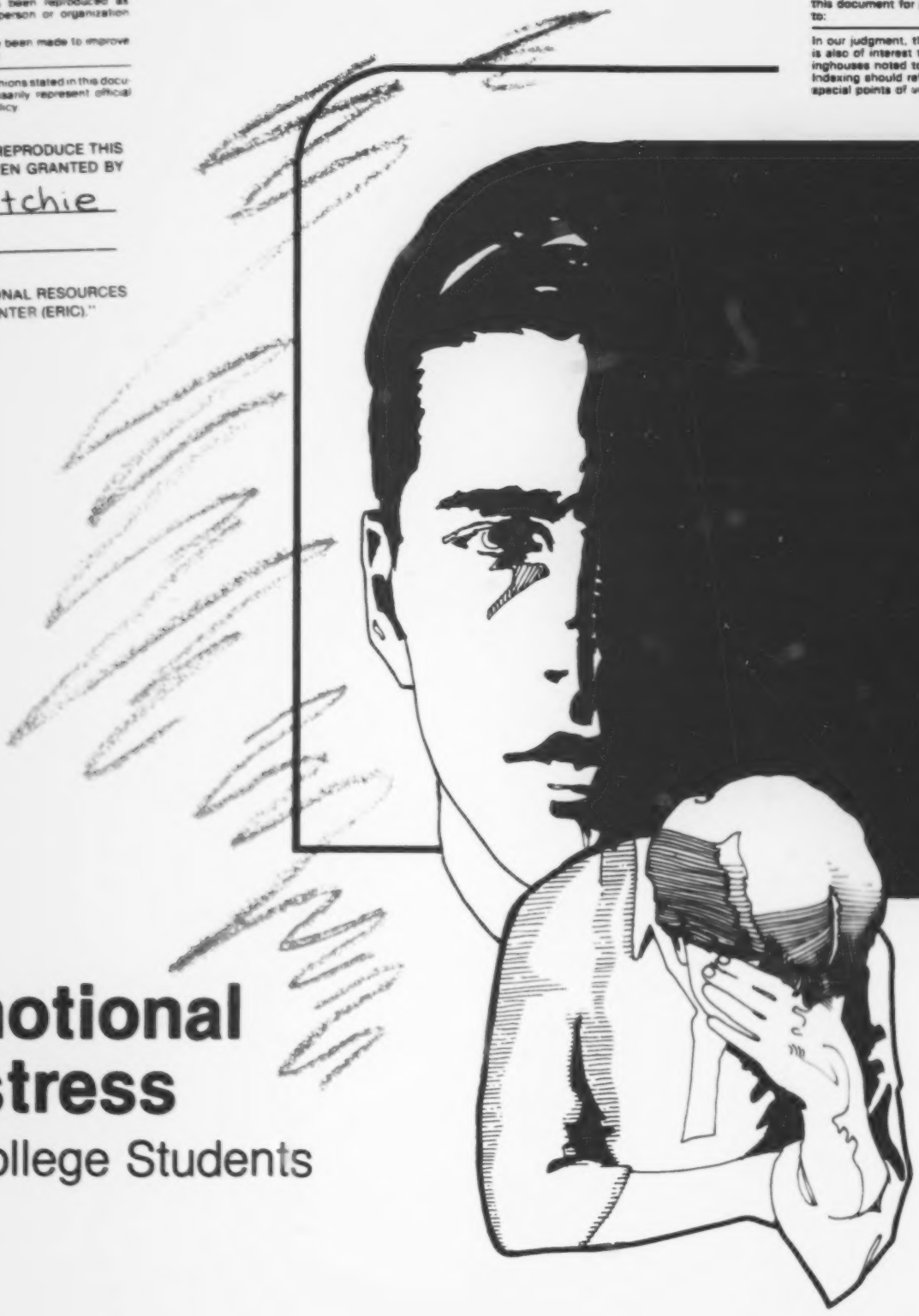


Emotional Distress

in College Students

FACULTY GUIDE FOR REFERRALS

Western Carolina University Counseling and Psychological Services

College students in today's world experience considerable stress. Relationships with friends and family can cause difficulties. Pressured to make good grades, they are also expected to work out a successful career plan. Juggling the demands of academic and personal lives often leads to emotional distress.

Sometimes, in trying to cope with their problems, students act in self destructive ways. Eating disorders or substance abuse may occur. Anger, depression, and anxiety are common. They may signal for help with aggressiveness, withdrawal, loss of contact with reality, even suicidal behavior.

Next to accidents, suicide is the leading cause of death in young people ages 18 to 24. In the last thirty years, the number of suicides among this age group has doubled. Studies show that college students are more likely to attempt suicide than those who are not in school. Students often try to conceal or deny suicidal tendencies. But when the warning signs are detected early, chances are good that serious behavior problems and suicide can be prevented.

If you are a faculty or professional staff member, Counseling and Psychological Services would like to offer you advice for understanding and responding when your students are in emotional distress. This brochure can be used as a reference for signs of extreme stress and advice on how to intervene. Counseling and Psychological Services also provides private consultation services for faculty and professional staff members who want to know how to help students during a difficult time.

COUNSELING AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

114 Scott Hall
Western Carolina University
(704) 227-7469

COMMON CAUSES OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

- Feelings of isolation and loneliness
- Breakup of an intimate relationship
- Unplanned pregnancy
- Sexual or physical abuse or assault
- Family conflict
- Divorce of parents
- Perceived rejection by family
- Identity confusion
- Low motivation or inability to have goals
- Death of a loved one
- Serious illness
- Academic pressure or failure

WATCH FOR THESE WARNING SIGNS

- Serious grade problems or a change from consistently good grades to poor performance.
- Excessive absences, especially when attendance has been good.
- Unusual or noticeably different patterns of interaction.
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses inappropriate to the situation.
- Inability to communicate clearly, having disjointed thoughts and garbled or slurred speech.
- Depressed, lethargic mood.
- Excessive activity and talking.
- Swollen, red eyes.
- Marked change in dress and hygiene.
- Loss of contact with reality.
- Physical violence.
- Suicidal talk or behavior.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you have noticed any of these warning signs, you are faced with deciding whether or not to intervene. This is often a difficult decision because of your lack of time and energy and the demands of your other students. On the other hand, your interest in his or her well-being can make an important difference to a young person in distress.

If you decide to intervene, here are suggestions:

- Talk to the student privately when neither of you is rushed or preoccupied. A few minutes of listening from you can give your student the confidence to decide what to do about the problem.

- If you have initiated the contact, express your concern in a non-judgmental way. Say something like, "I've noticed you've been absent from class and I'm concerned about you," instead of "Where have you been? Goofing off again?!"

- Be a sensitive, non-threatening listener. Let your student do the talking. As feelings begin to come out in the open, show that you understand by repeating to the student what you have just been told. Include both the content and the emotions of the situation. For instance, if your student feels lost and isolated on campus, you might say, "It sounds like you're not accustomed to a large campus and you feel left out of things."

- Talk about the student's options for dealing with the problem. Try to include the advantages and disadvantages of each possible solution.

- Don't evaluate the situation unless the student asks for your opinion. Respect the student's value system, even if you don't agree with it. Try not to be critical or judgmental. If you do, the student may turn away from you and never receive the necessary help.

WHEN YOU MAKE REFERRALS

Usually, it's best to be frank with your students about your ability to help them. If you need to refer the student because of the limits on your time, objectivity, and training, then say so. Your students will be reassured to hear that you can help them get assistance.

Students who are confused will be comforted if you tell them that they don't always have to know what's wrong before asking for help. Assure them that seeking help doesn't necessarily mean they have serious problems.

Depending on the situation, the student could be referred to friends, clergy, family members, community agencies, Counseling and Psychological Services, or other campus offices. The best kind of referral is one the student responds to.

When you refer students, try to prepare them for what they might expect. Tell them what you know about the person or service you are referring them to.

CONSULTATION SERVICES FOR FACULTY

If you want to help one of your students through a time of distress, staff members at Counseling and Psychological Services provide a consultation service to assist you in clarifying your own feelings and determining the seriousness of the situation. A consultation will also help determine if a referral is appropriate. At Counseling and Psychological Services, you can learn about resources both on and off the campus that are available to your student.

For information about a consultation, call 227-7469 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays, or drop by our office in Room 114 Scott Hall.

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

APPOINTMENTS

To schedule an appointment at Counseling and Psychological Services, tell your student to call 227-7469 or visit the office in 114 Scott Hall. Hours are 8 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays. It's best for students to arrange their own appointments.

Many students use the services of Counseling and Psychological Services, so explain to yours that he or she may have to wait for an appointment, ususally from a few hours to a few days.

In emergencies, the student always receives *immediate* help. Counselors are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling University Health Services, 227-7430.

Be sure to tell your student that services of Counseling and Psychological Services are confidential.

FIRST VISIT

On the first visit to Counseling and Psychological Services, the student will be asked to complete some forms. A counselor reviews the information provided on the forms, assesses the needs of the student, and decides how Counseling and Psychological Services can help. In emergencies, the forms are waived.

If the student and counselor agree that individual counseling is appropriate, the student will meet with a counselor each week. The sessions typically last for about one hour and continue from six to ten weeks.

The student may also be advised to enroll in a group program, or a referral may be made to another office on campus or a community agency.

Sometimes, after the first visit, the student leaves the center feeling able to handle the problem.

EMERGENCIES

tudents who are expressing direct threats to themselves or others, or are acting in a bizarre, irrational, or disruptive manner need emergency help. If you are with a student when this happens, try to stay calm. Find someone to stay with the student while you call one of these offices:

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES
8 a.m.-5 p.m.
Monday-Friday
227-7469

PUBLIC SAFETY
On call 24 hours
227-7301
(Transportation and/or protection)

UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICES
On call 24 hours
227-7430
(Consultation, evaluation, and
referral for emergencies)

In non-emergency situations when the student appears anxious, depressed, or emotionally distressed, but poses no immediate threat, call Counseling and Psychological Services. After working hours, call University Health Services.

OTHER RESOURCES

AIDS Hotline.....Toll Free (800) 342-AIDS

Alcoholics Anonymous.....(704) 293-5323

Campus Emergency.....(704) 227-7301

Children's Home Society.....(800) 632-1400

Drug Abuse Information.....(301) 443-6500

Family Planning Service.....(704) 255-5517

Fire Department.....(704) 586-2000

Handicapped Education.....(704) 227-7172

Jackson County Health Department.....(704) 586-8994

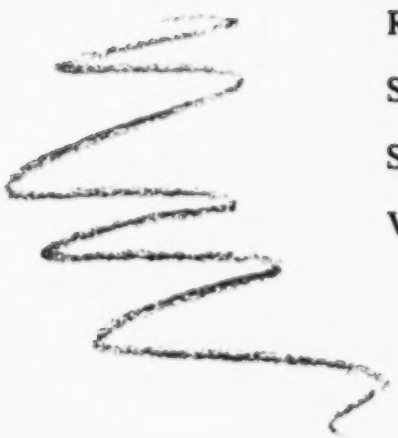
Mental Health Crisis Line.....(704) 524-8946

REACH (Rape Crisis or Partner Abuse) .(704) 586-8969

Social Services.....(704) 586-5546

Suicide Hotline.....(704) 227-7430

Veterans' Hotline.....(704) 227-7234



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